

NEWSIN brief

Argentina VP charged over graft

AFP, Buenos Aires

An Argentine judge on Friday filed corruption charges against Vice President Amado Boudou over his alleged role while he was finance minister in buying a company that printed local currency. Boudou, 51, who was Argentina's finance minister in 2009-2011, ran as Kirchner's vice president when she was re-elected to office in October 2011. The alleged misdeeds took place in 2010.

Blasts hit Cairo telecom centre; 1 killed

AFP, Cairo

Two bombs exploded in a Cairo suburb yesterday killing a teenager and wounding a woman, officials said, the latest in a string of blasts to hit the Egyptian capital this week. Militants have stepped up attacks in Egypt after the army ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 and a deadly crack-down by authorities on his supporters.

Blast kills 5 at Indian shipbreaking yard

AFP, Ahmedabad

Five people were killed and at least two injured yesterday in a gas explosion at Asia's largest shipbreaking yard on the west coast of India, police said. The accident occurred as a group of labourers were breaking up a ship at a yard in Alang, in the state of Gujarat. Police officials said an investigation was underway and the exact cause of the gas leak was not yet known.

ODDLY enough

US bridge to get netting to prevent suicide

AFP, Los Angeles

US transportation authorities agreed Friday to fund anti-suicide netting beneath the Golden Gate Bridge to prevent people jumping to their death from the iconic landmark, an official said. Construction of the system, which will provide netting extending 20 feet (six meters) on either side of the 1.7 miles long bridge, is due to be completed by 2018, he told AFP. More than 1,400 people have fallen to their deaths from the bridge since it was opened in 1937, including a record 46 suicides in 2013, the official said.

Jilted lover's revenge

AFP, Beijing

A jilted Chinese man named Wang spent \$40,000 to book four entire IMAX cinemas for first-day showings of the latest "Transformers" movie on Friday to prove his ex-girlfriend was wrong when she dumped him for being poor seven years ago, he said.

"Hu Xiaoyun: I was so poor when we were in our fourth year at college in 2007 that I could not afford just two film tickets," the man said in a posting on China's Twitter-like Sina Weibo.

"You said when you left for Beijing that I will always be that way. ... I just want to say maybe your choice back then was wrong."



Newly internally displaced Pakistani civilians, fleeing a military operation against Taliban militants in the North Waziristan tribal agency, arrive in Bannu, yesterday. Pakistani jets killed 17 militants in the latest raid on rebel hideouts in the country's restive northwest, officials said yesterday. Nearly half a million people have fled the offensive in North Waziristan.

Kiev extends truce with rebels

Seeks concrete steps from Russia after signing EU deal

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine yesterday sought concrete steps from Russia to back up a tenuous truce it extended with pro-Moscow rebels in the hope of calming a deadly insurgency sparked by its new westward course.

President Petro Poroshenko returned triumphant from Brussels on Friday having opened the way to Ukraine's eventual membership in the European Union by signing the final chapters of a landmark free trade and political association accord.

Ukraine is facing a 12-week insurgency that has killed more than 440 people and is viewed by both Kiev and its Western allies as Russian President Vladimir Putin's retribution for the February toppling of a leader who had ditched the very EU accord Poroshenko had signed in Brussels in favour of closer ties to the Kremlin.

Poroshenko ultimately decided to extend the shaky ceasefire until Monday evening under the

condition that Russia requires the insurgents to return border crossings to Ukrainian forces and set up a monitoring mechanism for a long-term truce.

The Ukrainian military on Saturday reported sporadic attacks by pro-Russian gunmen that resulted in no casualties and appeared to be on the decline in comparison to previous days.

Putin has publically backed the ceasefire's extensions and promoted direct talks between Poroshenko and top rebel commanders.

But the West wants the Kremlin chief to call on the fighters to lay down their weapons and relinquish control of state buildings they had seized across a dozen eastern cities and towns.

EU leaders agreed at their Brussels summit "to reconvene at any time to adopt further significant restrictive measures if a detailed list of concrete steps are not taken by Russia and the separatists by Monday."

UKRAINE CRISIS

'Rahul lacks ruling temperament'

IANIS, Panaji

In an indictment of Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi's governing abilities, party general secretary Digvijaya Singh yesterday said the Gandhi scion does not have a temperament suited to the ruling benches.

In an interview to a Goa cable news channel on Friday which was telecasted yesterday, Digvijaya Singh also said Rahul should have taken up the responsibility of leading the party in the Lok Sabha and taking on the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government.

"He is by temperament not a ruling person. He is by temperament someone who wants to fight

injustice," the Congress leader said.

Digvijaya's statement comes at a time when Rahul as well as his mother and Congress president Sonia Gandhi have been criticised for lack of leadership skills by both Congressmen as well as party detractors.

Digvijaya said he had suggested Rahul take up the role of the main opposition leader in the Lok Sabha, a responsibility given to Congress' Karnataka stalwart Mallikarjun Kharge.

"In a democracy, opposition space is necessary. Since the Congress is the largest opposition group, our Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi should have taken up the responsibility," he said.



People lay a wreath at the historical street corner where Gavrilo Princip assassinated Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia (on the poster), in Sarajevo, during ceremonies commemorating the 100th anniversary of their assassination, yesterday. Top right, Archduke Franz and his wife Sophia riding in their car, minutes before their assassination on June 28, 1914. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by 19-year-old Bosnian-Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip, bottom right, in Sarajevo is widely considered to have sparked World War I.

Shots that sparked the Great War

AFP, Sarajevo

Sarajevo yesterday marked 100 years since the assassination that triggered World War I, plunging Europe into the bloodiest conflict it had ever seen and redrawing the world map.

With the people of the Balkans still deeply divided over the legacy of that fateful day, separate commemorations were to be held to mark the occasion.

It was in on a Sarajevo street corner on June 28, 1914, that a Bosnian Serb nationalist shot dead the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, setting off a chain of events that sucked Europe's great powers into four years of violence unprecedented in its scale and intensity.

Many of the former foes marked the centenary on the sidelines of an EU summit on Thursday with a low-key ceremony at Belgium's Ypres, where German forces used mustard gas for the first time in 1915.

But the deep Balkan divisions stirred up by the anniversary have made it impossible for heads of state and government to come together at the site of the assassination in the Bosnian capital.

Wildly differing interpretations of 20th-century history endure in a region where the scars of the wars that marked the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, unleashing centuries of resentment and divisions, are still fresh.

And a particularly divisive figure is the archduke's assassin, the 19-year-old Serb nationalist Gavrilo Princip.

While the Muslim majority in today's Sarajevo see Princip as a terrorist who unleashed calamity, the Serbs regard him as a hero seeking to liberate the Slavs from the Austro-Hungarian occupier.

Resenting the notion that Serb nationalism was to blame for triggering the Great War, Bosnian Serb leaders have refused to join the main Sarajevo commemorations that will feature a

late afternoon performance by the Vienna Philharmonic, a symbolic envoy from the capital of a once-loathed empire.

Instead on Friday they unveiled a two-metre bronze statue of Princip in eastern Sarajevo, and will hold their own early afternoon ceremonies on Saturday in eastern Bosnia and in Belgrade.

Until Bosnia's war, Princip was Sarajevo's favourite son -- two years after he died in prison in 1920 his bones were dug up and brought to be buried in the city, which named a bridge after him and put up plaques in his honour.

During the war he was worshipped by the Bosnian Serb forces besieging the city in the 1990s, becoming an all the more loathed figure among the city's trapped Muslim and Croat civilians.

"Within the army bombing Sarajevo, Gavrilo Princip was a cult figure," said the Bosnian Muslim historian Husnija Kamberovic.

After the wars, the plaques honouring were ripped off and the bridge named after him reverting to its pre-1914 name.

Princip's brazen attack 100 years ago dragged almost half the world's population into a cycle of violence of unprecedented scale and intensity.

What became known as the Great War lasted more than 52 months and left some 10 million dead and 20 million injured and maimed on its battlefields, while millions more civilians perished under occupation, through disease, hunger or deportation.

Four of the world's most powerful empires -- Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman -- collapsed as the world map was redrawn and Europe's ruin cleared the way for the rise of a new superpower, the United States.

And World War I fanned the emergence of many of the ideologies that fashioned the 20th century and its conflicts, including anti-colonialism, Communism, Fascism and Nazism.



PHOTO: AFP

WORLD'S MOST FRAGILE NATIONS

South Sudan tops the list

CNN ONLINE

South Sudan's fractious leadership, mass killings and ethnic violence contributed to its No 1 position on the list of the, said Fund For Peace, a Washington-based nonprofit that compiles the annual list.

However, the United States -- which ranked 159 on the overall list of 178 countries, followed by France and the United Kingdom in a subcategory of "very stable" countries -- was among the countries that have worsened the most over the past year, a new report says.

The index is based on 12 social, economic and political indicators, including demographic pressures, poverty and economic decline, human rights and political impasse.

Until this year, the nonprofit referred to it as the list of failed states. Somalia had led

the list for six years. Somalia's fall to second place is due to its "trajectory of improvement," despite lawlessness, terrorism and ineffective government, the group said.

Other countries in the top 10 are the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Chad, Afghanistan, Yemen, Haiti and Pakistan. Syria was not left out: Its yearslong civil war placed it at No 15.

The list had some surprises as well. Iran led a pack of most-improved nations, with the report saying it had stabilized somewhat "after recent political and social turmoil."

The most-improved group included a cluster of countries with tense relations with the United States -- "quite coincidentally," according to the report's authors -- including Zimbabwe, Cuba, Bolivia and China.

Britain nears EU exit

Papers say after Cameron's defeat in EU

AFP, London

Britain's newspapers yesterday warned the country had edged closer to leaving the EU after Prime Minister David Cameron's "crushing" failure to block Jean-Claude Juncker becoming president of the European Commission.

But they were divided on whether it was Cameron or Brussels who was most to blame for making it harder to convince Britons to vote to stay in the European Union in a 2017 referendum.

"One step closer to quitting Europe," the right-leaning Daily Telegraph, Britain's biggest selling broadsheet newspaper, said in its main front page headline, while Rupert Murdoch's The Times said: "Britain nears EU exit."

The left-leaning Guardian ran with the almost identical "Britain closer to EU exit after Juncker vote", and the largely pro-EU Independent said: "Cameron Crushed - and UK edges closer to an EU exit."

The Sun tabloid took a more predictably patriotic line with the headline: "Cam: We're at war with EU."

Some British newspapers were heavily critical of Cameron's handling of the Juncker battle, which was widely viewed as making it

harder for him to win the renegotiation of Britain's terms of membership that he has promised before the referendum.

In an editorial, the Independent called it "a defeat -- and a disaster."

"Splendid isolation is not the way to win arguments in the EU," it said.

The Financial Times said it was a "a historic shift of power in the EU" as well as being a "dangerous moment for Britain's relations with Europe." But The Times said that Britain was better off in "splendid isolation".



It added that Cameron had "strengthened Britain's position with his robust opposition" and even his own chances in the UK's general election next year.

The Telegraph laid the blame squarely with the EU, saying it was up to Brussels to make the argument for Britain remaining in the bloc.

"If Europe wanted to drive Britain away, then the appointment of Jean-Claude Juncker was the way to go about it," it said in a leading article.

"Mr Cameron must now make his argument. But given that this latest insult -- a blow to British ambitions -- has come from within the EU, it is also up to the EU to make its own case as to why we should stay."

SURVEILLANCE ROW

NSA releases first statistics

AFP, Washington

The US National Security Agency released its first "transparency report" Friday, as part of an effort to quell the firestorm over reports of its massive data collection efforts.

The NSA report said that in 2013, it obtained fewer than 2,000 orders from the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.

That included 1,767 orders based on "probable cause" for an investigation, and 131 orders allowing the agency to collect incoming and outgoing phone numbers using a so-called "pen register" or "trap and trace."

The agency said it obtained just one order using Section 702 of the FISA intelligence law, which facilitates gathering foreign intelligence data on non-American people, groups or organizations outside the United States.

But the number of "targets," which could be persons or organizations, was 89,138 last year.

The NSA said it made 178 applications under the law's bulk collection or "business records" provision -- which allows the agency to sweep up vast amounts of telephone metadata.

That enabled the NSA to make a total of 423 specific queries last year to gather more data, along with queries on 248 "known or presumed US persons" and 172 other "individuals, entities or foreign powers."

The report said 19,212 "national security letters" -- administrative subpoenas that allow the FBI to collect information without a warrant -- were issued last year, containing 38,832 requests for information.

The intelligence agency, which has come under fire following news of massive data collection capabilities, said it released the report under a June 2013 directive from President Barack Obama.

The agency said it would continue to do so on an annual basis.